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## Rural Placer County mandarin orchard preserved

Side Hill Citrus Farm agrees to conservation easement

By: Gus Thomson of the Auburn Journal



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Rural Placer County mandarin grower Rich Ferreira said he's seen the land around him slowly gentrified over his lifetime.

With deep roots in the soil that grows mandarins, lemons and other citrus crops so well in the foothills, Ferreira decided that, at 61, he could take a small stand on his own land.

And four years after initially starting the process of creating a conservation easement for the 47-acre Side Hill Citrus Farm, between Auburn and Lincoln, the work has been done, just as the final mandarins of the season are being picked.

Ferreira has a total of 2,400 mandarin trees on 24 acres. He also harvests Meyer lemons and grapefruit for a market for fresh, locally grown, organic citrus that extends into the Bay Area.

Ferreira also has family and history to draw on as he farms.

"My dad and my mom were born here," Ferreira said. "My grandmother was born in Newcastle. I feel a deep connection to the area. Although I appreciate my neighbors and customers, I don't see how farming can go on much longer with the gentrification taking place, with the land being

split up into smaller pieces."

On Tuesday, Ferreira loaded 200, 25-pound boxes of Meyer lemons from the orchard to ship to a Bay Area distributor he's been doing business with for 20 years. He recently opened a stand to sell locally in Newcastle at the intersection of Old State Highway and Highway 193 that he said has done remarkably well.

But he also recently turned 65 and noted that he signed up for Medicare.

"One of my main goals is to make this place profitable to make it worthwhile for my kids or someone else to continue it in the future," Ferreira said.

With funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the Emigrant Trails Greenway Trust and Placer County totaling nearly \$300,000 to purchase the easement to prevent lot-splits or encroaching development while preserving oak woodland, Ferreira waived \$20,000 of the price as a good-faith gesture.


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Jeff Darlington, executive director of the Placer Land Trust, said the non-profit helped facilitate the sale but didn't participate in the agreement because of Ferreira's membership on the board.

"The county owns the easement and purchased it from Rich," Darlington said. "I think it's really remarkable for one of our board members to walk the walk, so to speak. He's gone through the process himself and actually permanently protected land."

Darlington said staff has searched the Internet to see if any other mandarin orchard anywhere else in the world has also received similar protection. Nothing was found, indicating Side Hill Ranch could be the world's first protected mandarin orchard, he said.

"Placer County is known for its mandarins," Darlington said. "We have a very special product here, among many others. To have one of those orchards, which I describe as producing a natural wonder, now under a conservation easement is an asset to the community."

Keywords:

side hill citrus farm rich ferreira conservation easement sierra nevada conservancy emigrant trails greenway trust placer county Placer Land Trust jeff darlington

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**Scott Johnson** · Top Commenter · Owner of Johnson Piano Service at Piano Technician

By the way in case you did not read the document here [http://www.placer.ca.gov/upload/bos/cob/documents/sumarchv/120821ABC/bosd\\_120821\\_09a\\_\\_p231\\_p246.pdf](http://www.placer.ca.gov/upload/bos/cob/documents/sumarchv/120821ABC/bosd_120821_09a__p231_p246.pdf) the answer to Scott Holbrook's question is that the total cost to the county is \$100,000. from a fund that is already earmarked for this type of investment. Yes investment is the proper term because the benefits from preserving this agricultural easement will pay dividends into the foreseeable future far in excess of the county investment. So called conservative thinkers like Jon and Scott Holbrook make the mistake of thinking that our essential economy only values currency which is an illusion as explained so very well in Walter C. Wagner's 2006 book "Moral Capitalism and the essential economy as managed by the workable market." The late Dr. Wagner was the Alexander Herron Distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of the Pacific.

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**Scott Holbrook** · Top Commenter · CEO/Janitor at Scott's Econo Lube N' Tune & Brakes

Did Placer County use General Funds to purchase land? Who will be in charge of this land? - How much did "Placer County" contribute to the \$300,000?? I like open space as much as anyone, and we sure have a comparable ton of it here - but there are a lot of needs and wants for our tax dollars out there, be they more "urban oasis" facilities and space accessible to more people, animal shelters, homeless shelters, staffing, infrastructure..... Just curious what the county will do with this new acquisition?

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**Diane Phillips** · Top Commenter · Sierra University

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**Jeff Darlington** · Executive Director at Placer Land Trust

To answer some questions not already answered: Rich Ferreira retains ownership of the land, not the County. And the County lost zero property taxes.

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**Jon Green** · Top Commenter

And how much property tax did the county lose. Suggest every other Placer County Mandarin Grower also apply for tax free status. I have 30 mandarin trees, I wonder if I can stop paying property tax?

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 1 · January 1 at 6:12am
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**Bob Rogers** · Top Commenter · Placer High School

Do you sell your mandarins Jon? It's not for mandarin growers but ranchers. Ferreira has 2,400 to your 30 or you have roughly 1% of what he's got. Your 30 trees wouldn't support a roadside fruit stand let alone a thriving operation. Your comparison is silly.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 1 at 12:34pm
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**Jon Green** · Top Commenter

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Bob Rogers I get almost 2500 lbs. And yes I do sell them. There are many growers in Placer County that sell a lot more than Ferreira and I would hope that they also receive the tax benefits that the Ferreira's get.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 2 at 6:18am



**Bob Rogers** · Top Commenter · Placer High School

Read Jeff Darlington's response Jon and stop being paranoid that some of your precious tax revenue is being subverted.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 2 at 8:31pm



**Scott Johnson** · Top Commenter · Owner of Johnson Piano Service at Piano Technician

Scott Holbrook and Jon Green, Did you read this? [http://www.placer.ca.gov/upload/bos/cob/documents/sumarchv/120821ABC/bosd\\_120821\\_09a\\_p231\\_p246.pdf](http://www.placer.ca.gov/upload/bos/cob/documents/sumarchv/120821ABC/bosd_120821_09a_p231_p246.pdf) What do you have to say now? Do you have a vision for the future that can support this kind of a goal as outlined in the Placer County general plan or do you object strongly enough to do something other than complain? The value that Mr. Ferreira has given to current and future generations exceeds by many times the short term cost to the county and the goals of the General Plan mandate that his contribution be excepted.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 2 at 9:41am



**Jon Green** · Top Commenter

i read it and it is bs.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · Yesterday at 8:33am



**Scott Johnson** · Top Commenter · Owner of Johnson Piano Service at Piano Technician

Jon Green Please expand on your thought. Thanks. Exactly what is BS about the County General Plan goal of preserving Ag land? What is BS about the grower giving up 200k in value, (as outlined in the linked document but not in the article), to make the easement investment pencil out for the county and giving up sub-development rights in order to maintain a commercially viable orchard? The grower could have divided the acreage into 10 acre ranchettes and made millions for himself but instead he has guaranteed the land will provide all the many benefits like water retention, contiguous wildlife habitat corridors, clean air, topsoil retention, local food production and on and on. The fact that you don't put any value on these things is the BS.

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